A.2

A.2   MetaArchive Project Description

A.2.1 With support from the Library of Congress, the partner institutions of this project envision a three-year process to develop a cooperative for the preservation of at-risk digital content with a particular content focus: the culture and history of the American South. The project group members will jointly develop: 1) a prioritized conspectus of at-risk digital content in this subject domain held at the partner sites, 2) a harvested body of the most critical content at the partner sites to be preserved, 3) a cooperative agreement for ongoing collaboration, and 4) a distributed preservation network infrastructure based on the LOCKSS software. The proposed work plan for this project builds on relationships and workflows developed during previous projects of the MetaScholar Initiative and other collaborating consortia.

A.2.2 Approach to Digital Preservation

A.2.2.1 The MetaArchive approach to long term digital preservation of at-risk content will initiate coordinated efforts by a decentralized group of peer institutions to mutually identify, preserve, and archive information. While it is questionable whether any centralized scheme for preservation can succeed over the long haul, decentralized mechanisms for mobilizing group efforts between cooperating institutions appear to hold promise for effective long-term models for preservation.   The success of the Internet itself is an example of why de-centered peer-to-peer approaches are often more robust and effective than hierarchical organizational architectures.

A.2.2.2 The MetaArchive project proposes an initial investigation of a cooperative model of peer institutions partnering for digital preservation purposes. This cooperative will build a network of collaborating institutions acting to preserve a corpus of critical cultural heritage content available only in digital forms. This preservation network will use the LOCKSS software, a major new system for distributed preservation of digital content. Collaborative partnership models based on this approach may be the best hope for successful digital preservation of our cultural heritage.

A.2.2.3 This project is a first step in advancing the new practice of digital preservation. In the long run, preservation of digital content will require much more than simply identifying and archiving content. Preservation efforts will require automated mechanisms for format migration, metadata validation, sophisticated rights management, and many more functions. But before these more advanced steps are taken, a foundation of practices is needed for distributed archiving and content conspectus building. Once this preservation network is established, we envision future projects to investigate and advance these additional areas of digital preservation.